

HEALTH ALERT

July 6, 2004

Contact: **Felix Aguilar, MD, MPH**
Acting City Health Officer
(562) 570 - 4087 phone
(562) 619-3689 cell phone
(562) 570 - 4310 fax

MOSQUITOES FOUND TO HAVE WEST NILE VIRUS IN THE CITY OF LONG BEACH

The State of California Department of Health Services (DHS) has confirmed mosquitoes carrying West Nile Virus (WNV) on the eastside of the City of Long Beach in an area serviced by the Greater Los Angeles County Vector Control District. The City of Long Beach Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) has also confirmed that three dead American crows, recently found in Long Beach, were infected with WNV.

The State DHS has reported confirmation of 15 human cases of West Nile Virus (WNV) infection in Southern California counties. More may be expected in California since WNV has been detected earlier than projected this year. To date, eleven human cases of WNV have been reported in San Bernardino, two in Los Angeles and two in Riverside. No human cases of WNV have been reported in the City of Long Beach. As of June 29, 2004, the Federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention indicated that human cases of WNV infection have been reported in eight states, with one death reported in the State of Arizona.

City of Long Beach Public Health Officials are taking precautions to prevent the spread of infection in the City and are urging residents to decrease their risk of WNV by reducing mosquito breeding.

Mosquito monitoring and abatement are key goals of the DHHS' Vector Control Program. The Program monitors and controls mosquito breeding in public areas by setting mosquito traps in breeding areas, and by mitigating mosquito populations by spraying for mosquitoes with larvacides and adulticides in public areas with stagnant water such as wetlands, streets, curbsides, pump stations, and abandoned swimming pools. The DHHS also treats flood control channels and storm water runoff systems.

City Public Health officials emphasize that the overall risk of contracting WNV infection and serious illness to humans from WNV is low. Most individuals who become infected with WNV will have no symptoms. Approximately 10 percent to 15 percent of infected individuals will have mild to moderate symptoms of fever, headache and body aches. **Less than one percent of individuals will develop**

serious neurological illnesses such as encephalitis and meningitis. However, the elderly and those with lowered immune systems are more susceptible to serious illness.

Since infected mosquitoes spread WNV, local residents can significantly assist assistance in reducing local risk of virus exposure by eliminating standing water on their private property to prevent breeding of mosquitoes. WNV is transmitted to humans and animals through the bite of an infected mosquito. Mosquitoes become infected with WNV when they feed on infected birds. As temperatures rise, mosquito populations are expected to increase. With this increase in the mosquito population, chances for WNV transmission will become higher.

The DHHS Vector Control Program controls mosquito breeding on a regular basis in public areas. However, the DHHS needs the assistance of local residents to keep mosquito breeding to a minimum on private property. Residents are requested to take the following precautions to protect themselves and control mosquito breeding:

- Remove pools of standing or stagnant water, which provide a breeding ground for mosquitoes. Debris piles, buckets, barrels, kid's toys, and tire swings are some common sources of stagnant water. Mosquitoes need water to complete their life cycle, therefore they are most active around stagnant water;
- Clear gutters and drains of standing water;
- Change water in birdbaths frequently;
- Properly maintain clean swimming pools and spas with proper filtration and chlorination levels;
- Limit the watering of lawns and outdoor plants to twice a week to avoid run off to gutters and around sprinklers;
- Limit your time outdoors when you notice mosquito activity (primarily at dusk and dawn) If you remain outdoors while mosquitoes are biting, wear clothing that provides more coverage of your skin (such as long sleeved shirts and pants);
- Use mosquito repellents containing DEET. **Residents should follow instructions on the label. Consult with your child's pediatrician for appropriate concentrations to be used on children under the age of two.**
- Make sure that doors and windows have tight fitting screens. Repair or replace screens that have tears or holes.

Businesses are also urged to check their property weekly and eliminate any standing or stagnant water and to maintain swimming pools to summertime conditions. Green or dirty pools can breed thousands of mosquitoes in a week's time, unnecessarily increasing the population's risk of contracting WNV.

American crows, as well as jays, magpies, flocks, ravens, and other birds of the Corvidae species are especially susceptible to WNV infection. The DHHS is requesting residents to cooperate by reporting dead birds which appear recently dead, have no injuries and have no evidence of predator trauma by calling **1-877-WNV-BIRD**. Residents may also report dead birds and arrange for pick up by calling the DHHS' Animal Control Division at (562) 570-7387. The public should not handle dead birds with their bare hands. If individuals must remove a dead bird, use a shovel, cardboard or plastic bag to handle the bird, and then it should be placed in a plastic trash bag.

If you have any questions regarding mosquito control and monitoring measures in the City of Long Beach, please feel free to contact the DHHS' Vector Control Program at (562) 570-4132 or go to the DHHS' website at www.longbeach.gov/health.

To report standing curbside water that has been present for longer than two days, please call the Vector Control Program or the City of Long Beach Public Works Department at (562) 570-2700.

Further information about the WNV may be obtained at the State of California Department of Health Services website at www.westnile.ca.gov, or at the Federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention website at www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dvbid/westnile.